



Alzheimer's Foundation of America

Our mission is "to provide optimal care and services to individuals confronting dementia, and to their caregivers and families—through member organizations dedicated to improving quality of life."

July 13, 2004

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Markey:

On behalf of the Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA) and its member organizations, thank you for the opportunity to offer our views on H.R. 4595, the Ronald Reagan Alzheimer's Breakthrough Act of 2004. We appreciate your leadership in introducing this important legislation, and we applaud your efforts to address the needs of individuals with Alzheimer's disease, their families and caregivers.

AFA is likewise dedicated to meeting the educational, social, emotional and practical needs of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related illnesses, and their caregivers and families. AFA's members are grassroots organizations that offer direct, "hands-on" services such as respite care, support groups, cognitive therapy programs, educational workshops, and memory screening for individuals with the disease and their families.

The bill would double federal funding for Alzheimer's research to speed a cure for this disease. Equally important, it would provide essential support for interventions to improve the quality of life for individuals living with the disease until a cure is available. Among its key provisions, the bill would create a tax credit for family caregivers, authorize the deductibility of long-term care insurance premiums, increase funding for caregiver support programs, expand access to respite care services, and promote public education and awareness.

H.R. 4595 represents an important step forward in our collective efforts to improve care for individuals with Alzheimer's disease. To further strengthen this legislation, AFA recommends the addition of related provisions to authorize a nationwide cognitive impairment screening and wellness program.

As you know, recent advancements in scientific research demonstrate the benefits of early medical treatment for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and early access to counseling and other support services for their caregivers. Promising research shows that available and emerging medications can slow the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and that individuals begin to benefit most when these medications are taken in the early stages of memory disorder.

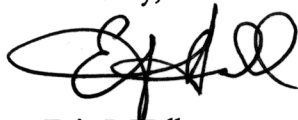
This intervention may extend the time that individuals can be cared for at home, thereby significantly reducing the costs of institutional care. With early diagnosis, individuals with the disease and their families can also take advantage of support services, and individuals can participate in decisions regarding their care. According to several research studies, such care and support can reduce caregiver depression and related health problems, thus further lessening the economic burden of this disease.

Recognizing these important benefits, AFA launched National Memory Screening Day as a collaborative effort with organizations and health care professionals across the country to promote awareness and early detection of memory impairments. On the third Tuesday of November, health care professionals administer free memory screenings at sites throughout the country. By leveraging this investment, the federal government can advance a national campaign to promote early diagnosis and treatment of Alzheimer's disease by expanding access to memory screenings.

AFA therefore recommends the addition of provisions to authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services to provide support for the development, expansion, and operation of programs to promote public education and awareness regarding the importance of memory screening and to expand access to screening services for memory impairment nationwide. This initiative represents a simple, cost-effective intervention that would benefit persons with Alzheimer's disease by prompting them to seek early diagnosis, medical treatment and social services support, while providing reassurance and information about cognitive wellness to the majority of individuals who do not show signs of memory impairment.

Again, thank you for your leadership in introducing H.R. 4595, the Ronald Reagan Alzheimer's Breakthrough Act of 2004. AFA looks forward to working with you to advance and strengthen this proposal as we continue our efforts to address the needs of individuals living with Alzheimer's disease, their families and caregivers. Please feel free to contact me at 866-232-8484 or Todd Tuten at 202-457-5215 if you have questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,



Eric J. Hall
Chief Executive Officer

cc: The Honorable Edward J. Markey

